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Providence Presbyterian Church
Christ the King Sunday
Thanksgiving Sunday
November 23, 2025
Jeremiah 23:5-6; Luke 23:33-43

"Nevertheless"

Recently, I read of a couple who had been married for quite a few years, who discovered, as most of us do, that as they grew older, their memories were not what they used to be.

One evening, while watching TV, the husband got up from his chair and his wife said, "While you're up...would you get me a bowl of Blue Bell ice cream?"

"Sure," he replied. The wife said, "Maybe you ought to write it down so you don't forget." "I don't need to write it down," said her husband. "I can remember." Then she added, "Well, I'd like some strawberries on top. You had better write that down." He said, "I can remember that. I don't need to write anything down!" To which she said, "Could you also put some whipped cream on top? I really think you ought to write it down, just to be safe." Growing quite annoyed, the husband responded, "I'm telling you for the last time, I don't need to write it down!" And he stormed off to the kitchen.

About 15 minutes later, he returned from the kitchen and handed his wife a plate of bacon and eggs. She stared at the plate for a while and then said, "You forgot my toast."

Whether it's failing memories or a failing government or a failing economy, many of us are wondering, "Who's really in charge?" Nothing is as it used to be. We have lost confidence in our leaders, many of whom have betrayed us and lied to us to protect their own interests. Confidence in political leadership is at an all time low. It certainly doesn't help that we are all in a 24/7 news cycle that highlights the faults and failings more than what is working.

News commentators, podcasters and virtually everyone on social media breathlessly tell us the latest developments in whatever scandal they are following and many of us jump down rabbit holes in an effort to make sense of our world. Is it any wonder that we wonder who's in charge?

As Christians, our theology reminds us that it is Christ, our only king, who is in charge. That's why this last Sunday of the Christian year is called "Christ the King Sunday," to remind us that despite everything that seems to be haywire in our world, Christ really is in charge. All of today's scripture and music depicts Christ as King.

We have presidents, governors, mayors and all sorts of elected leaders who try to convince us that they are in charge, but as followers of Jesus Christ, we know better than to put our trust and confidence in earthly leaders. We do live in a threatened, unsafe, and insecure world, where we are not sure who we can trust anymore.

Christ the King Sunday stands in contrast to the uncertainties of our world, declaring that Christ is our King. Christ the King Sunday uses the Gospel of Luke's portrayal of Jesus' last hours on the cross for this specific Sunday. That's a rather curious choice, isn't it?

How exactly does Christ's death on a cross shore up our belief that Christ is king? The crowd mocks Jesus, hanging on the cross - "If you are a king, act like it!" An inscription is placed over his cross - "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" (the first Latin letter of those infamous words, "INRI," still adorns some crosses today) Pilate and the soldiers meant it to ridicule this seemingly helpless man who was dying an excruciating death on the cross. Yet, in his final breath, he promises a thief that he would be with him when he reigns in paradise.

Christ reigns in our lives not because he is rich and famous, not because he commands armies and not because he controls the economy. Christ reigns supreme because he is the best of all of us. Christ is the model of who God intends us humans to be.

When you think of Jesus and all he did what qualities and characteristics stand out the most for you? This is not a rhetorical question – What qualities and characteristics of Jesus stand out for you? What words would you use to describe Jesus?

Since Jesus is our model for human behavior, is that intimidating? It certainly is to me. And yet, God doesn't leave us to our own devices to live up to that standard. That's where the Holy Spirit comes in. The Holy Spirit strengthens our resolve to be better than we naturally are. That's what sanctification means – the Holy Spirit works within us to make us better, holier, than we could possibly be on our own. Christ our King is unlike any other king because Christ shares power through the Holy Spirit.

When we gather for worship on "Christ the King" Sunday, we make a bold claim about power, and who ultimately rules our lives. Jesus Christ is the one who is in charge here!

When I was a little boy, I believed that my father could do anything. When things were going along really well for me, I was quite content to have him be my buddy, my friend, the guy with whom I played catch. But when things turned sour or began to unravel in my world, I didn't want a buddy - I wanted someone with authority to take command of the situation. I wanted someone to be in charge. I wanted a king.

Well, the same is true for me today on a much larger scale. When life is good and everything seems to be going my way, I'm happy to relate to God as my friend and sing, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." But when the night is darkest - when my world spins out of control, I want Jesus to be my King - I want to sing, "Rejoice, the Lord Is King."

Christ the King Sunday exists as a great "nevertheless" statement to the world. The kingdoms of this world may totter and sway. Nevertheless, one realm endures. We are surrounded by violence and tragedy. Nevertheless, Jesus sits on the throne of power. We live in a world where evil seems to be free to roam wherever it wants. Nevertheless, Jesus reins in evil and reigns supreme. We live in a world where things do not always work out for the best, where the innocent sometimes suffer unjustly, where people sometimes do mean and contemptible things, where humanity's progress is measured in inches and its regress may span centuries, where there is a huge amount of unreasonable tragedy, unexplained pain, and pointless suffering.

Nevertheless, Christians are bold to sing: "God's kingdom cannot fail, Christ rules o'er earth and heaven; The keys of death and hell are to our Jesus given: Lift up your heart, lift up your voice! Rejoice, again I say, rejoice."

Before we begin the great season of Advent next Sunday, today we pledge our allegiance to the King of the universe - the One who makes sense out of the nonsense of the world - the One who is wise, just and righteous - the One who ascended to the throne of heaven to rule our unruly world. In the midst of our busy, hectic, and sometimes turbulent lives, the Church invites us to enter the throne room, kick off our shoes, and sit at the feet of the King - the divine "nevertheless," who has authority over our anxieties and fears.

"Lift up your heart, lift up your voice! Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!" Because Christ is our King!

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Charge: Wherever you go, God is sending you. Wherever you are, God will equip you. God will accomplish a purpose in your being there. Christ who dwells within you has something He wants to do through you where you are. Believe this and go in God's grace, love and power. Amen